

LA CHAÎNE

UNE INFOLETTRE DE
PUNK MONTRÉALAIS
+ D.I.Y. SHOW LISTING
#10 — AUG/AOÛT 2023

It's a huge week for JETSAM — coming off of an incredibly successful (and FUN) trans benefit show last weekend that raised \$1500 for ASST(e)Q and Transmission Prison Project, they're also releasing a split EP, opening for the legendary HIRS collective and then zipping off to Toronto to play New Friends Fest. Thanks so much to vocalist Jack and bassist Neon for somehow finding time amid all the chaos and excitement to answer all my questions! — Taylor

LA CHAÎNE: First off, can you tell us a bit about your new split release "Assimilation is Death"?

JETSAM: We've been together as a band for about a year now. "Powerviolence is for lovers" really felt like coming together with an idea and experimenting with the different ways in which it could go and the kind of sounds and themes that would resonate with us and with those who would hopefully listen to us. Each of the songs on that EP sprang from one of our first band practices together almost fully-formed, which was pretty magical.

For the second EP, we were a lot more intentional about what we wanted songs to sound like — we knew what we liked from the first EP, and had more ideas about things we wanted to try. "Anéantir le neant" feels like the result of this. We took our favourite parts of the first EP and we pushed further into those directions, both in the sound of the music and the themes behind it. The structure of the individual songs is a little more complex and narrative-driven. It interacts more with the crowd in how it plays with intensity and the theatre of emotions we interact with.

Your lyrics and songs oscillate between unbridled rage and sadness toward this capitalist hell and incisive critiques and callouts of specific problems that make this world unlivable — borders, isolation, recuperation, just to name a few! Can you say anything about your writing process and how you weave that rawness and clarity together?

Neon: I would say that while the first EP and the band itself was born of grief, the second one truly came out of finding community and some hope and the joy of holding hands with our loved ones as everything falls apart around us. It's easy to fall into despair or turn to nihilism, but joy, especially queer and trans joy, comes from elevating each other in spite of it all. This all of course requires its fair share of not only love, but also a desire to attack, tarnish, and leave the status quo in ruins.

I will not speak for Jack's lyricism except to say that it is always amazing and inspiring to see them sat down with 5 books and 20 or so internet tabs open. They have a very scholarly and librarianish approach to music writing and it compliments my approach to writing the instrumentation with an ease I have never before experienced. It always feels like a privilege working with them.



Jack: Speaking to the lyrics, sometimes I'll look through old notes or journals and just find a little piece of writing and that becomes a song. I don't write consistently, so it might be ten years old, or a month old... Sometimes it's a journal entry about an abusive relationship I was in ten years ago; sometimes it's like an angry text I wrote Neon on my way home from work about someone who was staring at me. And then other times, we'll jam out a new song and I'll ask everyone what it feels like and then match that up with one of the topics that is important to us — gender nihilism, prison abolition, finding hope in despair and ruin, something like that. One of our songs, "Clayborne," is about a specific moment in the Mars trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson. All that to say, we take inspiration from all over the place; there isn't one consistent approach to it. But anger and sadness are my personal primary drives, so those are often what I'm writing about, and the music we play expresses those well.

I think it's kind of a joke that powerviolence fans are always proclaiming the "return of powerviolence," and maybe I'm just playing into that trope, but I kind of feel like we are actually seeing a huge spate of new bands in this space right now (pv, grind, skramz, etc) — both in Montreal and further afield. Do you think that's the case, and if so why now?

Neon: I perhaps can speak less about what kind of space we actually do occupy in the scene as I've always struggled with feeling like an imposter.

With that said, it does seem to me that people find it easier to act surprised by a "resurgence" of a genre when truly what is happening is the gatekeepers being pushed aside for others with better stories to tell to finally take on the stage.

Jack: It's funny because we have a whole song about gatekeeping the scene and how it just results in this homogenised, insular, sterile, useless thing. There have always been people on the fringes of that making music that is actually like vital and powerful and interesting;

I think what we're seeing now is that those people are able to take more of the spotlight. We've made and claimed space for that. And like, people want it. As soon as we started saying we were starting a powerviolence band, people were all over it, and that excitement has really buoyed us along. That's exactly what we were hoping for when we called ourselves a powerviolence band, to tap into that legacy and to say, hey this is actually by and for us. We said it so it's true. And you're doing the same thing with VERIFY! It's so rad to not be the ONLY new cool new PV band in town.

Aw, thanks! There's an established tradition of queer people, trans and nonbinary people and women playing in totally ripping, loud, fast, heavy bands, but I am always so stoked to see more representation in this type of music. Can you talk about how your queerness informs JETSAM? Do you have any words for other queer/NB/trans people who might want to get into playing genres of music that have historically been a bit gatekept?

Neon: Our queerness informs most of what we write about. We always want to be careful when it comes to writing about things outside of our own experiences, and we are three white trans and queer musicians and anarchists living on stolen land. There are so many stories that aren't ours to tell, but we also do want to elevate those stories better told by others who experience them. A big part of Jack's approach to writing involves quoting and referencing from literature and documents by and about other experiences inherently linked to our own and to our community.

Jack: I guess our queerness/trans-ness is a lens through which we look at the world, an embodied knowing that the sorts of pervasive norms that we see everywhere are not the only ways of existing, and that they are often coercive and oppressive. And once that veil is pulled back, you see coercion and oppression everywhere, you become more sensitive to it. Or at least, you should. If being queer and trans is a life-giving joy, it's also, at the same time, one of the things that makes us so sad and angry all the time — [continued on back]